

"GREEK CULTURE" OR "ORTHODOX CULTURE IN GREEK"?  
BULGARIAN-GREEK RELATIONS PRIOR TO THE "CHURCH  
STRUGGLE"

Raymond Detrez

Ghent University, Belgium

*Abstract: The concept "national culture" in the sense of a culture with obvious national features is relevant only from the nineteenth century onwards, when intellectuals intentionally started creating works displaying distinctive national features. Searching for such in the pre-modern era is futile, since at that time national awareness was absent. Typical of pre-national consciousness is allegiance to a religious community.*

*As Tăpkova-Zaimova and Stojčeva pointed out, in the Balkans the distinction between "one's own literature" and "foreign literature" is not valid any more from the fifteenth century on, "when the idea of a common Orthodox unity of all Christians had emerged and materialized". Studying Bulgarian-Greek literary relations in the pre-national era in terms of national cultures in contact is in fact anachronistic. As Giuseppe Dell'Agata noticed, we do not deal with a "Greek culture" as opposed to that of other Balkan ethnic groups, but with (Orthodox) "culture in the Greek language".*

*In our contribution we provide additional arguments supporting this thesis, paying attention to the perspectives it opens for further research.*

*Keywords: Bulgaria, Greece, Orthodox Christianity, language, literature*

Since the nineteenth century to our days Bulgarian historians have produced a considerable number of books and articles dealing with the relations between Bulgarians and Greeks. During these years, the perception of these relations has undergone significant changes. While in the nineteenth century many historians blamed the "Greek yoke", imposed by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, for attempting to assimilate the Bulgarians, a view that has remained popular in mainstream historiography, from the early twentieth century on, some of their colleagues have reassessed the role of the "Greek" Patriarchate in Bulgarian history, arguing that prior to the nineteenth century

the Graecization of the Bulgarian urban population had resulted from a spontaneous process in which the clergy played only a limited part, rather than from a deliberate policy<sup>1</sup>. Although it occupied only a modest place in the national historical narrative, the "church struggle", during which Bulgarians opposed what was perceived a Greek spiritual dominance, was regarded as emblematic of Bulgarian-Greek relations. Eventually, the focus was removed to the competition between Bulgarians and Greeks in Macedonia in the late nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century, during which, to be sure, ecclesiastical issues continued to play an important role as well. In the meantime, Bulgarian-Greek relations in the Middle Ages offered plenty of opportunities to patriotically minded historians to highlight Bulgarian military exploits (the defeated Nicephorus' skull turned into a goblet by Khan Krum) and Bulgarian sufferings (Samuel's 15.000 blinded soldiers).

In spite of the more open-minded views, an outspokenly ethnocentric perception of Bulgarian-Greek relations has continued to prevail. Bulgarians and Greeks have been regarded as two ethnic communities clearly distinguishable throughout their history, having close relations with each other but both of them sticking to a separate and clear-cut cultural identity of their own. However, in the pre-national era under Ottoman rule Bulgarians and Greeks, speaking different languages and being aware they constituted different ethnic groups, nevertheless felt themselves members of the Orthodox Christian community in the first place, while ethnic belonging was all but irrelevant to everything important in their daily lives. This being so, it makes little sense to deal with Bulgarian and Greek history and culture and with their mutual contacts in ethnic, let alone national terms. This is probably what Vasilka Tăpkova-Zaimova and Pavlina Bojčeva had in mind stating that the distinction between "one's own literature" and "a foreign literature" was no longer valid in the Balkans after the fifteenth century, "when the idea of a common Orthodox unity of all Christians had emerged and materialized"<sup>2</sup>. Giuseppe Dell'Agata

<sup>1</sup> Х. Гандев, *Проблеми на Българското възрождение*. София, Наука и изкуство, 1976, с. 79; Й. Иванов, *Гръцко-български отношения преди църковната борба*, В: Й. Иванов, *Избрани произведения*. Т. 1, София, Наука и изкуство, 1982, с. 157–182; И. Шишманов, *Увод в историята на българското възрождение*, В: И. Шишманов, *От Плиска до Раковски*. София, Захарий Стоянов, 2004, с. 192.

<sup>2</sup> В. Тъпкова-Займова, П. Бойчева, Св. Варвар във византийската и среднобългарската агиографска традиция, В: П. Петков (ред.), *Българската църква през вековете*. София, УИ „Св. Кл. Охридски“, 2003, с. 153.

holds that in the case of the late eighteenth-century Balkans, "Greek culture" does not mean necessarily "its concrete ethnic character, which opposes it to other Balkan peoples, but that set of ideological, scientific, political and cultural achievements in the largest sense, which in a certain historical period is transmitted through Greek language". It is, he concludes, not "Greek culture", but "a culture in the Greek language"<sup>3</sup>.

Proceeding from these assumptions, I want to share some observations on Orthodox Christian written "culture in the Greek language" in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century. Let us start with the Greek language. The spread of Greek in the Bulgarian lands and in the Balkans in general in the Ottoman period is often explained as a result of a calculated language policy pursued by the Patriarchate of Constantinople. However, the role of the Patriarchate was not at all so unequivocal. The Patriarchate primarily defended its ecumenical mission, its material interests and its privileged position under the sultans. Continuing the Byzantine tradition, it certainly preferred Greek as the language of church services and church administration, and, since a command of Greek paved the way for a career in the church hierarchy – the only career available to male Christians – ambitious young men undoubtedly were encouraged to "Graecize". At the same time, the Patriarchate not only tolerated, but even encouraged the use of other languages than Greek in church services if they would strengthen the faith and cohesion of the flock. Prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, church services in Bulgaria were still overwhelmingly celebrated in Church Slavonic.<sup>4</sup> When the liturgy was in Greek, the Gospel and the sermon were often read in Bulgarian<sup>5</sup>. Books in Arabic, Romanian, and Karamanlidhika (the language of the Turkophone Christians in Anatolia) were printed with the blessing of the Patriarchate.

The Patriarchate's language policy on the parish level depended to a great extent on the local notables, represented in the church councils. The general

<sup>3</sup> Дж. Дел'Агата, *Гръцко-български успоредници по въпроса за езика в епохата на Възраждането*, В: *Студии по българистика и славистика*. София, Български месечник, 1999, с. 53.

<sup>4</sup> О. Тодорова, *Православната църква и българите, XV–XVII век*. София, Акад. изд. „Проф. Марин Дринов“, 1997, с. 267; И. Макарова, *Българският народ в XV–XVIII вв. Етнокултурно изследване*. Москва, 2005, с. 51.

<sup>5</sup> For instance in Ohrid, according to К. Шапкарев, Няколко критически бележки върху обнародваните досега материали по историята на възрождането на българщината в Македония. Ч. 3, *Български преглед*, 2, 1895, N 9–10, с. 276–27.

picture is that it was mainly the local Graecized establishment in the cities that insisted on having church services and education in Greek. The spread of the Greek language was accelerated by the emergence, from the eighteenth century on, of a commercial petty bourgeoisie that was essentially multi-ethnic, but in which Greeks played a dominant part<sup>6</sup>. This explains why massive Graecization was a relatively late phenomenon – not much older than the eighteenth century – and why it remained limited chiefly to the cities.

The Graecophone urban population rapidly increased as a result of the massive immigration of Bulgarians attracted by the job opportunities the commercial activities in the cities offered. A command of Greek was a necessity for professional reasons. Greek also became the language that marked the social distinction between the well-to-do, educated city dwellers on the one hand and the poor and “backward” peasants, who spoke their own vernaculars on the other. Finally, Greek was the preferred tool of intellectual communication of clergymen and from the middle of the eighteenth century on, when Enlightenment literature entered the Balkans, also of laymen.

All these well-known functions of Greek actually corresponded to particular variants of Greek: New Testamentic Greek, liturgical Greek, archaizing (to various extents) learned Greek, colloquial Greek, an artificial compromise language called *katharevusa*, Greek dialects and so on<sup>7</sup>. The situation was extremely complicated; it may suffice here to keep in mind that there existed a clear distinction between written or learned Greek and common, spoken Greek. Both together constituted the famous Greek diglossia, with archaizing learned Greek as the high code, and spoken Greek as the low code<sup>8</sup>.

The various functions of learned Greek were summed up here to draw the attention to the fact that as a liturgical language, as the *lingua franca* in commercial transactions, as the language of the urban elites, as a social marker, and as the language of (religious or Enlightened) scholarship, the learned variants

<sup>6</sup>To be sure, these Greeks cannot always be distinguished from Graecized non-Greeks. I am under the impression that the number of real, “ethnic” Greeks was rather limited.

<sup>7</sup>For an overview of the Greek language variants and their development in the context of Greece and the Balkans, see P. Mackridge, *Language and National Identity in Greece, 1766–1976*. Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 2009.

<sup>8</sup>For the phenomenon of diglossia and the sociolinguistic terms “high” and “low code”, see Ch. Ferguson, *Diglossia*, *Word* 15, 1959, p. 325–340; J. Fishman, *Bilingualism with and without diglossia; diglossia with and without bilingualism*, *Journal of Social Issues* 23, 1967, N 2, p. 29–38.

of Greek were used as a kind of “international” languages by the social and cultural elites of the multi-ethnic Orthodox Christian community. In all these functions Greek was somehow disconnected from the Greeks as an ethnic group and had become to a large extent an “ethnically unmarked” language. As a liturgical language and a language of scholarly communication, it can be compared to Latin in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. As a language, marking social distinction, it reminds of French in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries all over Western Europe, while in Habsburg Central Europe, German fulfilled the same function. Currently, English has replaced Latin as the international language of scholarship. Latin, French, German and English in their respective functions appear to be “ethnically unmarked” languages. The use of French and German by the social upper classes in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth century did not result in these classes changing their ethnic or national identity; they did as a rule not become Frenchmen or Germans. In the same way, we may assume that the use of Greek by representatives of the upper classes in the Balkans did not turn them into (ethnic) Greeks<sup>9</sup>. When Bulgarians called themselves “Greeks”, it was an indication of religious and social, rather than ethnic belonging. Evidently Greek remained also the language of a particular ethnic community, but so did French and German and does English today as well. The variant of Greek that was most closely connected to the Greeks as an ethnic group were the Greek dialects of the peasants and the herdsmen, in which the Greek folk songs were performed. By the way, this kind of Greek was looked upon by educated city-dwellers with the same contempt as were the other Balkan vernaculars.

On the other hand, Greek was always closely related to Orthodox Christianity, not only as the language of the New Testament and the divine services, but also because it fulfilled the various functions mentioned above exclusively within the framework of the Orthodox Christian community. The use of an ethnically “unmarked” language as the common language of the multi-ethnic Orthodox Christian community obviously is what Dell’Agata seems to understand as characteristic of a culture which is “not a Greek culture”, but “a culture in the Greek language”. This does not mean, of course, that everyone spoke Greek; in fact, while the uneducated majority spoke various vernaculars, only the social and cultural elite had a command of learned Greek. In general, there was “diglossia without bilingualism”. However, as a result of the unique

<sup>9</sup>This does not exclude, of course, that in the course of several generations certain groups change their ethnic identity, but in such cases many other conditions are involved as well.



combination of its many functions Greek occupied a pivotal place within the Orthodox community in the Ottoman Empire. In fact, the linguistic situation sketched above can be typified as an "extension" of Greek diglossia: opposed to learned Greek, we find not only spoken Greek, but also the other Balkan vernaculars in the same position.

Let us now turn our attention to the written culture of the Balkan Orthodox community. Applying the sociolinguistic terms "high code" and "low code" to Greek literature, one may distinguish "high literature" consisting of theological, philosophical, briefly scholarly works in learned Greek for the educated, and "low literature" consisting predominantly of a religious edifying works in the spoken language for the uneducated<sup>10</sup>. Both were related, graphically speaking, as a theological treatise to a Sunday sermon.

By the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in order to render the basic teachings of Christianity accessible to those unfamiliar with learned Greek, Damascenus Studites published his *Treasury*, a collection of sermons and other religious texts, written in a language that Damascenus called "common" or "colloquial" (κοινή γλώσσα, λόγος πεζῆ φράσει)<sup>11</sup>. He was not the first to use the spoken language in written form, but by all means the most influential.

From the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century on, Damascenus's *Treasury* was translated into colloquial Bulgarian – a language called "common" or "simple" (на общин езикъ, на простомъ езикомъ, Българскій простъ езикъ) by the translators.<sup>12</sup> It was intended, as the translators emphasized, to serve an audience of "simple people" who understood neither Greek, nor Church Slavonic: "simple Bulgarian language so that the simple and ignorant Bulgarian people could understand and be edified" (Българскій простъ езикъ къ разумѣнію и къ оувѣдѣнію простому и невѣждому Болгарскому народу)<sup>13</sup>. Subsequently, a tradition of Bulgarian *damaskins* came into being, consisting of translations and original Bulgarian texts of the same nature, written in the same "simple"

<sup>10</sup> To be sure, the terms "high literature" and "low literature" do not imply any assessment neither of the aesthetic value of these texts, nor of the social or cultural features of their users. Sociolinguists use the terms "high code" and "low code" in the same way.

<sup>11</sup> Δαμασκηνός ο Στουδίτης, Βιβλίον ονομαζόμενον Θησαυρός, ὅπερ συντεγράφητο ο ἐν Μοναχοῖς Δαμασκηνός ο υποδιάκονος καὶ Στουδίτης ο Θεσσαλονικεύς, Venice, 1557–1558.

<sup>12</sup> Дж. ДелАгата, Гръцки и славянски встъпителини формули към словата на Дамаскин Студит, В: *Студии по българистика и славистика*. София, Български месечник, 1999, с. 45–50.

<sup>13</sup> А. Петканова-Тотева, *Дамаскините в българската литература*. София, Изд. на БАН, 1965, с. 202.

language. Bulgarians *Damaskins* were produced throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, the very last ones by the middle of the nineteenth century. Thus a particular diglossical situation emerged, in which the educated Greeks and Bulgarians read "high literature" in learned Greek, while the uneducated read (or listened to) "low literature" in "common" or "simple" Bulgarian.

One might object that Church Slavonic functioned as a Bulgarian learned language or high code, that there might have existed a Bulgarian diglossia, not involving Greek, all the more so since Church Slavonic was used as a high code not only by the Bulgarians and the Serbs, but also by the Romanians, which means that it was also to some extent a kind of "international", "ethnically unmarked" language, just as Greek. However, in the Danubian Principalities Church Slavonic was replaced in the seventeenth late century by Rumanian and Greek. In Bulgaria and Serbia, its functions were limited almost entirely to the liturgical sphere. Virtually no new texts had been written in Church Slavonic for ages<sup>14</sup>. In fact, it had become a "dead language". In the late eighteenth century, the Serbs in the Habsburg Vojvodina adopted Slavono-Serbian as a kind of compromise language in between Church Slavonic and spoken Serbian, but it was soon replaced by Vuk's spoken Serbian. In Bulgaria, a similar compromise language, *Slavjanobălgarski*, was used by Neofit of Rila, Hristaki Pavlovič, Neofit Bozveli, Georgi S. Rakovski and a few others, but its spread was very limited<sup>15</sup>.

Bulgarian texts written in the "simple", "common" language steadily diversified thematically. The *damaskins* increasingly acquired secular features, Paisii wrote his *History of the Bulgarian Slavs* (1762) in common Bulgarian and Sofroniy of Vraca used it in his writings. However, a "high literature" written in a Bulgarian "high code" did not exist. Instead, as Karl Gutschmidt points out, "[t]he Greek language (...) also partly exerted the functions of a literary language, for instance in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – in the

<sup>14</sup> Н. Николова, *Билингвизмът в българските земи през XV–XIX век*. Шумен, УИ „Епископ Константин Преславски“, 2006, с. 190. Nikolova does not underestimate the role of Greek in Bulgarian society, but nevertheless thinks there is a *triglossia*, consisting of New Bulgarian spoken language, New Bulgarian literary language, and traditional literary language, that is Church Slavonic (с. 191–192). However, damaskin Bulgarian is a very rudimentary literary language and Church Slavonic obviously occupies so marginal a place that it can hardly be regarded as the third component in a triglossical relation (There was no diglossia in France or Italy either because of the use of Latin in the church services).

<sup>15</sup> Е. Георгиева и др. (ред.), *История на новобългарския книжовен език*, София, Изд. на БАН, 1989, с. 92–93.

Hellenic-Bulgarian schools, in correspondence<sup>16</sup>. His opinion is shared by the authors of the authoritative *History of the New Bulgarian Literary Language*<sup>17</sup>. I. Макарова categorically states that Greek "forced out Bulgarian even among the national cultural elite"<sup>18</sup>.

If Church Slavonic did not function as a living Bulgarian high code anymore and learned Greek actually had taken over its functions, it can be argued indeed that there existed a diglossic literary system consisting of "learned Greek" as a "high code" and "common" or simple Greek and Bulgarian as corresponding low codes.

The other vernaculars spoken by Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire fit in with this diglossic literary system as well. This is particularly obvious for karamanlica, in which a relatively large amount of popular religious texts, translated from Greek, were produced<sup>19</sup>. Karamanlica was related to learned Greek in the same way as *Damaskin* (from Damascene) Bulgarian, except for the fact that there was a rich tradition of Karamanlica printed books, while *Damaskins* were never printed. Orthodox Albanians and Vlachs had church services in Greek and their cultural elites read "high literature" in learned Greek<sup>20</sup>. Priests used Albanian or Aromanian as low codes when reading the Gospel to the faithful or delivering a sermon<sup>21</sup>. Prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Albanian and Aromanian texts are extremely scarce, but those that have come down to us are virtually all of a religious nature and belong to the same "genre" as the Bulgarian *Damaskins*<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> К. Гутшимит, Към въпроса за връзката между развитието на културата и книжовния език в епохата на българското национално възраждане, В: *Езиковедска българистика в ГДР*, София, Изд. на БАН, 1973, с. 100.

<sup>17</sup> Георгиева, *История на новобългарския книжовен език*, с. 92–93.

<sup>18</sup> И. Ф. Макарова, У источников духовного возрождения (болгары под властью Константинопольского патриарха), В: В. Виноградов (ред.), *История Балкан. Восемнадцатый век*. Москва, Наука, 2004, с. 272.

<sup>19</sup> J. Eckmann, Die Karamanische Literatur, *Philologiae Turcae Fundamenta* 2, 1964, с. 822.

<sup>20</sup> At variance with Bulgarian, which possessed a dead high code – Church Slavonic, – Albanian and Aromanian had never had a liturgical variant.

<sup>21</sup> K. Giakoumis, The Policy of the Orthodox Patriarchate Toward the Use of Albanian in Church Services, *Albanobellenica* 4, 2011, p. 137–171; P. Mackridge, *Language and National Identity in Greece, 1766–1976*. Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 61.

<sup>22</sup> R. Elsie, *History of Albanian Literature*, Vol. 1. New York, Columbia University Press, 1995, p. 122–130; Th. Kahl, Limba și intenționalitatea primelor texte scrise în

Albanian, Aromanian and *Karamanlica* join (spoken) Greek and Bulgarian in the extended diglossic relationship with learned Greek:

Learned Greek				
Albanian	Aromanian	(spoken) Greek	(spoken) Bulgarian	<i>Karamanlica</i>

In other terms, literature written in "learned" Greek actually functioned as the "high" literature of all Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman empire of whatever ethnic origin: Albanians, Vlachs, Aromanians, Greeks, Bulgarians, Karamanlis<sup>23</sup>. In addition, they all had, although not all to the same extent, a "low" literature in their respective vernaculars. In all these cases these vernaculars in their written form represented a kind of "auxiliary" languages, resorted to in order to render the religious teachings accessible to those, who did not know learned Greek (including uneducated Greeks). All these "low literatures" were closely linked to high Orthodox literature in Greek, not only through the diglossic relationship, but also because they consisted of translations from Greek or imitations of Greek models.

The pivotal place of Greek in the Orthodox Christian community in the Balkans may be deduced from the massive presence of Greek books outside Greece properly. From 1750 to 1840, 1115 different titles (not copies!) of Greek printed books circulated in Bulgaria<sup>24</sup>. The thematic survey Manjo Stojanov compiled contains not only religious, but also scholarly books, novels, textbooks, manuals and so on<sup>25</sup>. These books were not only read by the Greeks in Bulgaria; they are found in Bulgarian private and public libraries, in libraries in Bulgarian schools and in Bulgarian monasteries, obviously serving a Bulgarian readership. To compare: in that same period only

aromână (1731–1813), In: *Idem, Istoria aromânilor*. București: Tritonic, 2006, p. 24–42; A. G. Lazarou, *L'aroumain et ses rapports avec le grec*. Thessaloniki, Institute for Balkan Studies, 1986, p. 126–141.

<sup>23</sup> The situation in Serbia and Rumania slightly differs from the one we described for Albanian, Aromanian, Bulgarian, Greek and Karamanlica. Discussing them in depth here would lead us too far from Bulgarian-Greek relations, on which is the focus of the conference.

<sup>24</sup> М. Стоянов, *Стари гръцки книги в България*. София, Народна библиотека „Кирил и Методий“, 1978, с. 47–168; *Idem, Българска възрожденска книжовина*, I. София, Наука и изкуство, 1957, с. 471–472.

<sup>25</sup> Стоянов, *Стари гръцки книги*, с. 291–313.



52 titles of Bulgarian printed books circulated, the first being published in 1806 (Sofroniy's *Nedelnik*)<sup>26</sup>. No statistical information about Greek books circulating among Albanians and Aromanians is available, but the situation must be similar. Obviously, these books satisfied the intellectual needs of the Bulgarian – and for that matter Albanian and Vlach – educated people who did not insist on having books in their own language. If they had insisted, they would have had.

Orthodox writers of all ethnic origins were writing for an ethnically just as diverse Orthodox readership. To be sure, the majority of these authors were Greeks, but non-Greeks also substantially contributed to Orthodox written culture in Greek. In Moschopolis, Albanian and Aromanian intellectuals published books in Greek<sup>27</sup>. We know the names of about thirty Bulgarian and forty Vlach authors writing in Greek and having acquired some literary fame<sup>28</sup>.

It is of course perfectly possible to study the literatures of the Balkan nations as separate national literatures. It has so far even been the rule. However, it appears that the conceptualization of these literatures in the pre-national era as components of a common Orthodox Christian written culture in which the Greek language (ethnically unmarked) plays a pivotal role possesses a considerable explanatory force. To start with, it corresponds to the mental make-up of people in the pre-national or pre-modern era, to whom religion and not ethnicity was their basic collective self-identification. Historians who believe

<sup>26</sup> N. Danova, La modernisation de la société bulgare aux XVIII<sup>e</sup> – XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles: la communication et le rôle de la langue grecque, *Bulletin de l'Association Internationale d'Études du Sud-Est Européen* 32–34, 2002–2004, p. 200–201.

<sup>27</sup> M. D. Peyfuss, *Die Druckerei von Moschopolis, 1731–1769. Buchdruck und Heiligenverehrung im Erzbistum Achrida*. Vienna, Cologne, Böhlau Verlag, 1989, S. 82–83.

<sup>28</sup> For the Albanians, see Elsie, *History of Albanian Literature*, 124–130; for the Bulgarians, see Николова, *Българският език*, с. 109; Стоянов, *Българска възрожденска книжнина*, с. 455–475; А. Алексиева, *Книжовно наследство на българи на гръцки език през XIX век*, Т. 1. *Оригинали*. София, Гутенберг, 2010; for the Karamanlis, see Mackridge, *Language*, p. 64–65; for the Vlachs, see Γ. Ξεάρχος, *Αντοί είναι οι Βλάχοι*. Αθήνα, Ταβερνίκης, 1994, σ. 51–53; P. Mackridge, The Greek Intelligentsia 1730–1830: a Balkan Perspective, In: Richard Clogg (ed.), *Balkan Society in the Age of Greek Independence*. London, MacMillan, 1981, p. 71. Probably, the real ethnic origin of many more “Greek” authors has remained unrevealed. On the other hand, not all authors included in the surveys referred to here belong to the pre-national era. Some of them used the command of Greek they had acquired during their formative years in the pre-national period to defend national causes afterwards.

that people in the pre-national era people had a clear-cut ethnic consciousness, were loyal to their ethnic community and cared about the preservation of their ethnic identity are unable to explain why Greek so easily widely spread among Bulgarians in church services, education, as a tool of intellectual communication and so on. To them, Bulgarians who espoused Greek were *gärkomani* (“maniacs” of Greek), apostates (*rodootstăpnici*), “deceived” (*zabludeni*) or victims of an imaginary “Greek yoke”. However, none of these qualifications is actually an explanation. Proceeding from the idea of an “Orthodox culture in the Greek language”, the pieces of the puzzle fall into place. “We” are not only the Bulgarians, but all Orthodox Christians, while “the others” are not the Greeks, but the Muslims, the Catholics and the Jews. As Orthodox Christians in the first place, they did not consider Greek as a “foreign” language – in the sense of the language of “the other” –, but as the common language of the entire Orthodox community. Again, not all members of the Orthodox Christian community in the Ottoman Empire knew Greek, but the cultural elites of all ethnic groups did. “Literature in the Greek language” was not regarded as a foreign literature, but as “our” “common” literature. *Damaskin* literature was intended to serve a Bulgarian audience, not because the *damaskinari* thought the Bulgarians should have a literature in their own language, but because they did not understand Greek and should have access to the Christian doctrine. The authors addressed their authors not as “Bulgarians”, but as “Christians”.

Finally, it transpires that those Orthodox Christian peoples in the Balkans who in the pre-national era had no “high literature” in their own language – like the Bulgarians and the Karamanlis – or hardly any written literature at all – like the Albanians and the Vlachs – in fact were not at all without a “high literature”. They had access to an Orthodox Christian high literature written in Greek – Greek not being the language of the Greeks, but that of the Orthodox Christian community to which they belonged.